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## THE GIRAFFE.

THE specimens of the giraffe now comparatively easy of access must have rendered the appearance of this animal so familiar to most of our readers, that they will probably be surprised to learn, that at one period the very existence of such a creature was doubted, and the accounts given of its size, form, and colours were regarded as mere travellers' tales. This surprise, however, is considerably lessened when we consider the amount and quality of the information extant, respecting this animal, at a comparatively recent period. Purchas tells his readers, that the camelopard was "a beast not often seen, yet very tame, and of a strange composition, mixed of libard, harte, buffe, and camel; and by reason of his long legs before, and shorter behind, not able to graze without difficulty." In another passage, he says it was "so huge, that a man on horseback may pass upright under him, feeding on leaves from the tops of trees, and formed like a camel." The fore legs were said to be twice as long as the hind legs, "so that one who was not acquainted with it, would think it was sitting, although it was standing. Such was the length of the neck, and the animal raised his head so high when he chose, that he could eat with facility from the top of a lofty wall; and from the top of a high tree he could reach to eat the leaves, of which he devoured great quantities." These palpable exaggerations are contained in a description, otherwise tolerably accurate, of a giraffe seen by some Spanish travellers, in the year 1403; so that we need not be much astonished if sober people treated the whole matter as fabulous, and consigned the giraffe to the same tomb as the unicorns, satyrs, griffins, and other monsters, in the existence of which the ancient naturalists placed such implicit faith.

It was not, in fact, until the end of the last century that Europeans obtained any precise and credible information as to the form and habits of the giraffe, an animal which must have been well known to the Romans of the empire, as we find that it was exhibited on many occasions in their amphitheatres, and one of the emperors (Gordian III.) had as many as ten giraffes living at one time.

The giraffe is undoubtedly the tallest of all living quadrupeds; the male, when full grown, sometimes measuring seventeen feet from the top of the head to the fore feet. Nearly half this height is due to the length of the neck, which, however, contains only the same number of vertebræ (seven), as the neck of any other quadruped. Hence, although the movements of the neck are sometimes not devoid of grace, there is generally a degree of stiffness about them, and we never get the elegant curves which the neck of the swan and of many other birds present to our view. This structure, however, may well excite our admiration in another way—it exhibits in a striking manner the wonderful resources of the Creator, who can form by a simple modification of the same plan, and without the addition of any new parts, the short, thick neck of the elephant, and the long, slender, tapering column which supports the elegant head of the giraffe. And our admiration is increased when we consider how perfectly this structure fits the creature for its mode of life, and enables it to play the part assigned to it in nature. An inhabitant of the arid regions of tropical Africa—from Nubia almost to the Cape of Good Hope—where the amount of herbage would scarcely suffice for the sustenance of the smallest herbivorous animal, the stately giraffe is enabled by means of his long neck to browse peacefully upon the tender twigs and foliage of the trees scattered here and there in the desert, which derive their moisture from far below the parched and dusty surface of the ground. And in this respect, even the small number and large size of the vertebræ of the neck are found to be not without their object; for if the number of these bones were increased sufficiently to give this part of the animal greater flexibility, the labour of maintaining it in the erect position would be vastly increased, and the creature would be, to a certain extent, unfitted for the peculiar conditions in which it is placed. The giraffe is assisted in reaching down his food by the singular prehensile power of his tongue, which is capable of being protruded from the mouth to a considerable distance and by an admirable arrangement of the muscles of which it is composed can then seize upon any object within its reach. In this way, the tongue of the giraffe serves him as an organ of prehension almost like the trunk of the

elephant, although by no means capable of performing the same variety of offices as the proboscis of that unwieldy quadruped.

The head is undoubtedly the most beautiful part of the giraffe. The delicacy of its form, the gentleness of its aspect, and the softness of its full, lustrous eyes, render the head of the giraffe one of the most charming objects to be found in the animal creation. Like most other ruminant animals (the ox, deer, etc.), the giraffe possesses two horns; but these differ remarkably from those of any other quadruped with which we are acquainted. In the deer tribe we find the horns forming branched antlers, often of great size, but always falling off annually, and giving place to a new pair. In the ox and antelope, on the contrary, the horns consist of a permanent bony core, covered by a sheath of the substance commonly known as horn, and these weapons are never shed, but continue growing during the whole life of the animal. The horns of the giraffe present the characters of neither of these groups, and, to a certain extent, may be said to exhibit a combination of both. Like the latter, they consist of permanent bony processes of the skull, but, instead of a horny covering, they are clothed with the same skin that covers the rest of the head; a circumstance which also occurs with the deciduous antlers of the deer during the period of their rapid growth, although the skin dies and peels off as soon as the horns have attained their full size. The horns of the giraffe are three or four inches in length, and terminate in a singular tuft of hair, which gives them an appearance altogether different from those of any other animal. It is generally supposed, that these appendages to the head, which occur in both sexes of the animal, are rather intended for ornament than use; but this does not appear to be the case, for the males have been observed to use them with great violence in their combats, and one of the females in the Zoological Gardens is said to have driven her horns through an inch board.

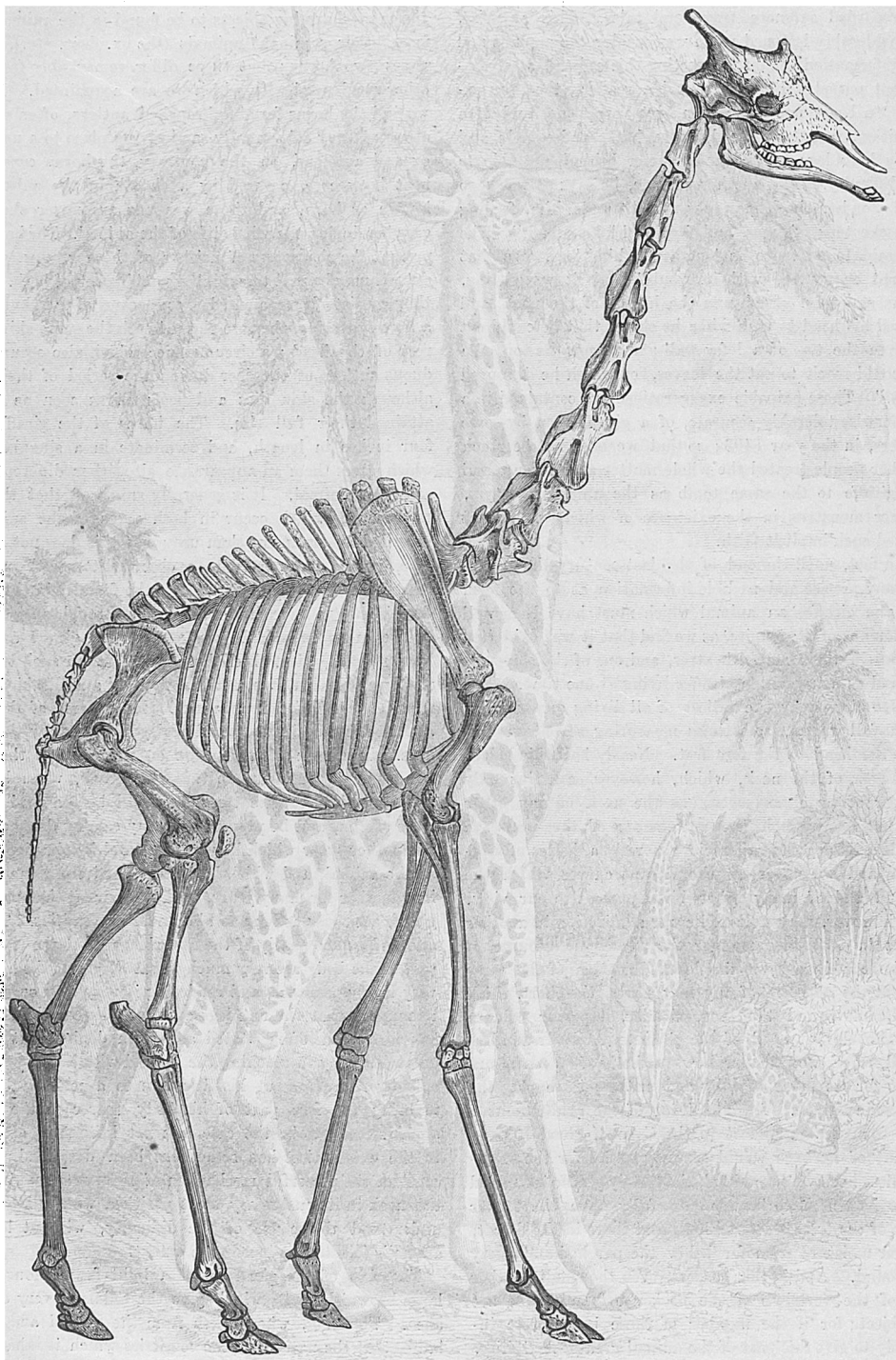
The most formidable weapons of the giraffe are, however, his hinder hoofs, with which he kicks out with such tremendous force that even the lion is sometimes repelled and disabled by the wounds thus ignobly inflicted upon him. His powers of defending himself against his enemies are wonderfully increased by the position of the eyes. These are situated quite on the sides of the head, and are remarkably prominent, so that the giraffe, when browsing on the twigs of his favourite trees, can still keep a good look-out on all sides of him, and be prepared for any coming danger.

Another error which has been induced by the singular appearance of the animal, and which has been copied from one natural history into another for many years, is the statement that the fore legs of the giraffe are twice as long as his hinder extremities. The fact is, that all the legs are nearly of the same length, but the shoulders and fore part of the body are very much elevated, giving the hinder quarters a very low appearance, and rendering it very easy, on a cursory glance, to suppose that the fore legs are much longer than the hinder. It has also been often stated and often denied that the giraffe has great difficulty in reaching the ground with his mouth, and succeeds only by stretching out his fore legs to a considerable extent so as to bring the fore part of his body nearer to the ground. This appears really to be the case in most instances, although scarcely to the extent that has sometimes been described; and when we consider the powerful mechanism of ligaments required to maintain the neck in its customary erect position, we shall be able easily to understand the cause of the difficulty, without lengthening the animal's legs to any inordinate extent.

The skin of the giraffe is of a light fawn-colour, covered with large brownish spots, which give the animal a very elegant appearance. The skin, when taken from the animal and dressed, is so large, that the natives of the countries which it inhabits sometimes cover their huts with a single skin; and Le Vaillant, the French traveller in Africa, mentions this as the first indication of the existence of the animal that he met with. "I was struck," he says, "by a sort of distinction which I perceived on one of the huts; it was entirely covered with the skin of a giraffe. I had never seen this quadruped, the tallest of the inhabitants of the earth; I knew it only by false descriptions and figures, and could therefore scarcely recognise its robe. And yet this was the skin of the giraffe. I was in the country inhabited by this creature; I might, perhaps,

see some of them alive ; I looked forward to the moment when I should be thus recompensed, at least in part, for all the sufferings and annoyances of my expedition." The thickness of the hide, however, occasions its application to another and less picturesque use. It is considered by the natives to be the best material for sandals ; and in this form, although the sight of it may never again produce

down on horseback. Mr. Gordon Cumming, however, in his book on "South African Field Sports," relates several instances of his having done this ; and Mr. Methuen, in his "Life in the Wilderness," says, that any person of light weight, mounted on a pretty good horse, can easily overtake a herd of giraffes, and cut off the one he wishes to shoot. He gives the following description of the



SKELETON OF THE GIRAFFE.

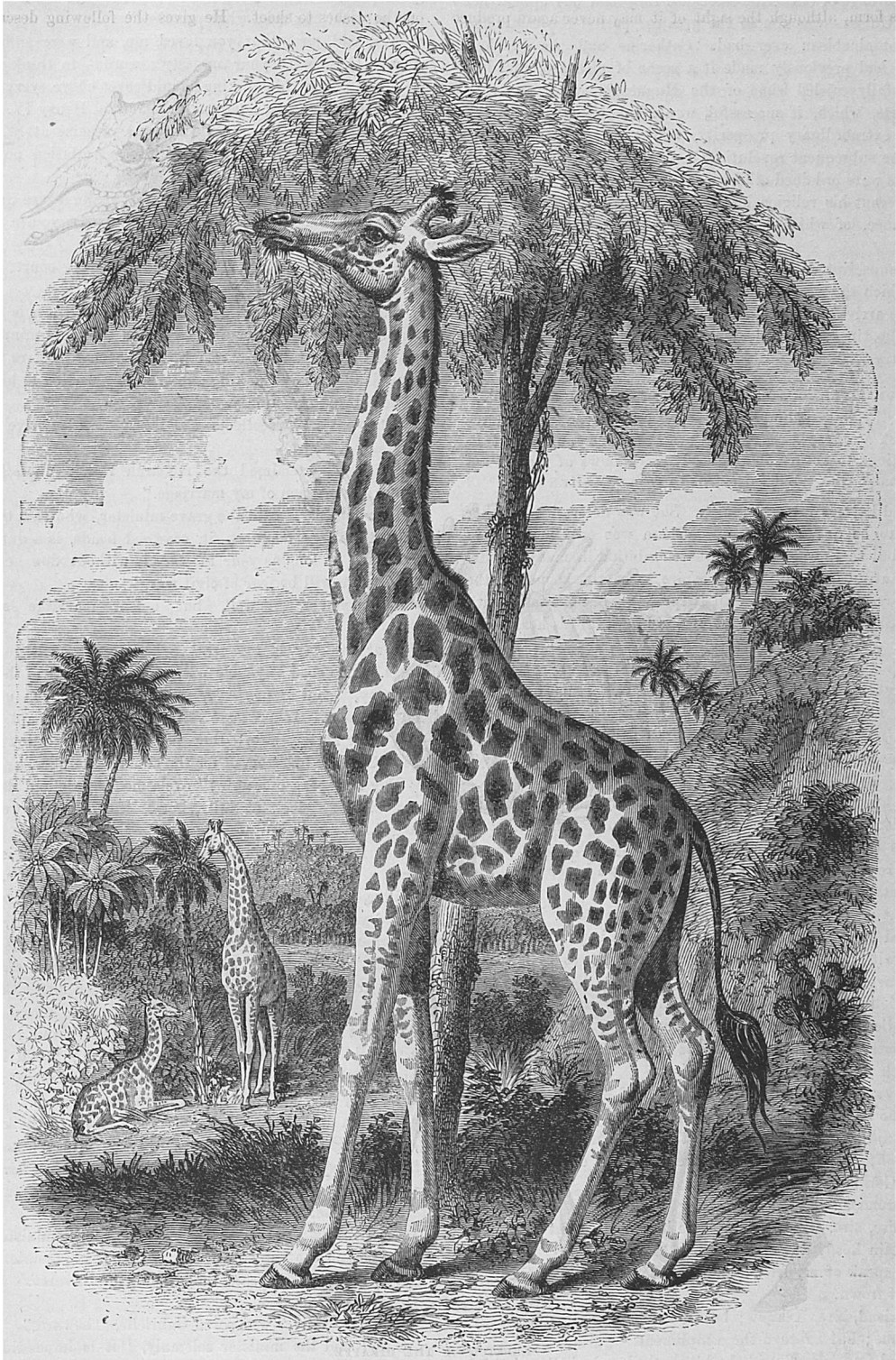
the same feelings in the mind of any future naturalist as those so eloquently expressed by Le Vaillant in the passage just quoted, it may certainly greatly assist him in his search after the many other wonderful things still to be discovered in the vast continent of Africa.

It is generally supposed that the giraffe is an exceedingly swift beast, and that it is difficult, if not almost impossible, to run him

process, with which we will conclude this article : "We espied some giraffes quietly cropping the high boughs of the mokalo-tree ; their long taper necks stretched to the full length, twisting their long prehensile tongues round the leaves and young shoots. . . . The animals soon perceived us, and took to flight, charging through some bushes, and striding clear over others with their Broddignagian legs, and cantering in the most ludicrous manner possible ; the

hinder legs at each spring coming before the fore ones, and seeming to work outside them by at least two feet; their tails were curled, and they proceeded with a peculiar jumping motion, their long taper necks and lofty heads overtopping the tallest shrubs. I was quickly

have annihilated;—truly is 'the fear of man on all creatures.' Thorns scratched and tore my clothes to ribbons; all my companions vanished, though reports on all sides proclaimed the work of death in progress; and my giraffe amusing itself by throwing dirt and



THE GIRAFFE.

alongside the largest, and contrived to separate it from the herd, when, though strongly excited, I could not help remarking the strange sight which these colossal brutes exhibited, each followed by such comparatively insignificant dwarfish men and horses, whom, had the fugitives possessed courage to make resistance, one of their kicks must

sticks behind it in my face, I galloped a-head, and, dismounting, fired my favourite two-ounce Pinday's rifle behind its shoulder, when, to my great joy, the animal stopped, after running twenty yards—reeled—tottered, and laid its steeple-neck prostrate on the earth."